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Application No.: 09/638,457

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Docket No.: 324212003100

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (Previously presented): An offline-online points system comprising:
machine logic operable to provide users with an interface to submit codes obtainable by the users from items;

machine logic operable to maintain a set of valid codes and to determine whether the codes submitted by the users are valid and if valid then to credit respective users with points, the points being cumulable into respective point balances, the points cumulable with other points credited for point actionable activities, including one or more of viewing an advertisement, and registering with a website; machine logic operable to accept items for auction from the users, to accept bids from the users on the items, and to determine which users won items; and

machine logic operable to subtract, from respective point balances, appropriate quantities of points from users who won items and to credit such quantities of points to respective point balances of users who submitted such items for auction.

Claim 2 (Previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 1, further comprising:

a user database for tracking the point balances of the users.

Claim 3 (previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 1, wherein the account balance is M points prior to the user's submission of the code, and wherein the code logic is configured for updating the account balance to M+N points after the user submits the code and if the code is valid.

Claim 4 (Cancelled)

Claim 5 (previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 1 wherein the code is C letters in length from an Alphabet of L letters.

Claim 6 (previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein C is 10.

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Claim 7 (previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein L is 29.

Claim 8 (previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein L is 36.

Claims 9-23 (cancelled)

Claim 24 (Previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 1, wherein the accumulated points are maintained in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

Claim 25 (Previously presented): The offline-online points system of claim 1, further comprising a machine logic for generating the code, the code being fixed onto a medium such that the code is obtainable from the medium offline.

Claim 26-37 (cancelled)

Claim 38 (Previously presented): A system for incentive points earning and redemption, comprising:

machine logic, with an auction database, for auctioning items in an auction;

machine logic, with a store database, for maintaining information on items offered by a plurality of businesses;

web server logic by which a user may interact with the auction web server and the store web server, including participating in the auction of an item offered by a business of the plurality of businesses; and

a database operable to track a point balance of the user in an account of an account database having a plurality of accounts, to transfer points among the plurality of accounts, and to characterize each point of the point balance as one of purchase and attention incentive points, the points redeemable for value including for an item which the user won at auction, wherein purchase and attention incentive points have different payment values.

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Claim 39 (cancelled)

Claim 40 (Previously presented): A system as in claim 38, wherein the user's interaction comprises at least one of registration, and an indicia of attention to an ad, in relation to which the database logic is configured to receive into the user account a predetermined number of attention incentive points earned by that user.

Claim 41 (previously presented): A system as in claim 38, wherein the user's interaction involves entering a winning bid for the item being auctioned in relation to which the database logic is configured to dispatch a predetermined number of points taken out of that user's account.

Claim 42 (previously presented): A system as in claim 38, wherein the points are maintained in the user account in an encrypted form to reduce unauthorized interference with the user account.

Claim 43-49 (cancelled)

Claim 50 (Previously presented): A computer-readable medium encoded with computer program instructions for performing a process comprising:

receiving codes obtained from items and submitted by users;

comparing the codes against a set of valid codes and, if found to be valid, crediting users that submitted the codes with points;

accumulating the credited points in respective accounts with other points credited for point actionable activities including one or more of viewing an advertisement, and registering with a website;

accepting items for auction provided by one or more of the users;

accepting bids on the items for auction from one or more of the users;

determining a winner from among the bidding users for each item at auction; and

subtracting amounts of points from accounts of auction winners and adding those points to accounts of users who provided the items for auction.

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Claim 51 (Previously presented): The computer readable medium of claim 50, further comprising maintaining the accumulated points in encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

Claim 52 (Previously presented): The computer readable medium of claim 50, wherein the points in user accounts are redeemable for a gift or a discount.

Claim 53 (Cancelled)

Claim 54 (Previously presented): The computer readable medium of claim 50, wherein the auction involves one or more of an automated closing, automated bidding, automated selling, and auction alert.

Claim 55 (Previously presented): The computer readable medium of in claim 50, further comprising adding points to user accounts by authorizing credit points to those users deemed highly active.

Claims 56-74 (Cancelled)

Claim 75 (Withdrawn): The offline-online points system of claim 4, wherein the auctioning of the items occurs in an auction having an initially fixed end time, and if bidding in the auction is slower than a threshold, ending the auction sooner than the initially fixed end time.

Claim 76 (Withdrawn): An online merchant affinity points method comprising:
providing points to a plurality of online merchants, the points providable in exchange for at least, advertising revenue, and web traffic; and

establishing an online venue for redeeming for value, from users, at least a portion of the points provided to the merchants, the points obtained by the users from the merchants by engaging in point actionable activities at websites associated with the merchants, wherein points may also be obtained at a website of a provider of the points, the point actionable activities including at least one of registering at the web sites, viewing ads, and clicking on ads.

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Claim 77 (Withdrawn): The online merchant affinity points method of claim 76, further comprising:

establishing an account for the user, the account for maintaining a point balance of the points obtained by the user;

categorizing the points obtained by the user into a plurality of categories; establishing point expiration rules for each of the plurality of categories; and

reducing the point balance based on expiration of points in one or more of the plurality of categories.

Claim 78 (Withdrawn): The online merchant affinity points method of claim 76, further comprising:

establishing an account for the user, the account for maintaining a point balance of the points obtained by the user;

categorizing the points obtained by the user into a plurality of categories; establishing point valuation rules for points in each of the plurality of categories; and

providing an account value based on the point valuation rules and amount of points categorized into respective categories.

Claim 79 (Withdrawn): The online merchant affinity points method of claim 76, wherein value includes donation of points to a charity, wherein the donation of points is convertible into a cash value for donation to the charity by the online venue.

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